



National Intelligence Estimate

Prospects for Iraq's Stability: A Challenging Road Ahead



January 2007

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The Director of National Intelligence serves as the head of the Intelligence Community (IC), overseeing and directing the implementation of the National Intelligence Program and acting as the principal advisor to the President, the National Security Council, and the Homeland Security Council for intelligence matters.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence is charged with:

- Integrating the domestic and foreign dimensions of US intelligence so that there are no gaps in our understanding of threats to our national security;
- Bringing more depth and accuracy to intelligence analysis; and
- Ensuring that US intelligence resources generate future capabilities as well as present results.

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL

Since its formation in 1973, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) has served as a bridge between the intelligence and policy communities, a source of deep substantive expertise on critical national security issues, and as a focal point for Intelligence Community collaboration. The NIC's key goal is to provide policymakers with the best, unvarnished, and unbiased information. Its primary functions are to:

- Support the DNI in his role as Principal Intelligence Advisor to the President and other senior policymakers.
- Lead the Intelligence Community's effort to produce National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) and other NIC products that address key national security concerns.
- Provide a focal point for policymakers, warfighters, and Congressional leaders to task the Intelligence Community for answers to important questions.
- Reach out to nongovernment experts in academia and the private sector—and use alternative analyses and new analytic tools—to broaden and deepen the Intelligence Community's perspective.

NIEs are the DNI's most authoritative written judgments concerning national security issues. They contain the coordinated judgments of the Intelligence Community regarding the likely course of future events.

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES AND THE NIE PROCESS

National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) are the Intelligence Community's (IC) most authoritative written judgments on national security issues and designed to help US civilian and military leaders develop policies to protect US national security interests. NIEs usually provide information on the current state of play but are primarily "estimative"—that is, they make judgments about the likely course of future events and identify the implications for US policy.

The NIEs are typically requested by senior civilian and military policymakers, Congressional leaders and at times are initiated by the National Intelligence Council (NIC). Before a NIE is drafted, the relevant NIO is responsible for producing a concept paper or terms of reference (TOR) and circulates it throughout the Intelligence Community for comment. The TOR defines the key estimative questions, determines drafting responsibilities, and sets the drafting and publication schedule. One or more IC analysts are usually assigned to produce the initial text. The NIC then meets to critique the draft before it is circulated to the broader IC. Representatives from the relevant IC agencies meet to hone and coordinate line-by-line the full text of the NIE. Working with their Agencies, reps also assign the level of confidence they have in each key judgment. IC reps discuss the quality of sources with collectors, and the National Clandestine Service vets the sources used to ensure the draft does not include any that have been recalled or otherwise seriously questioned.

All NIEs are reviewed by National Intelligence Board, which is chaired by the DNI and is composed of the heads of relevant IC agencies. Once approved by the NIB, NIEs are briefed to the President and senior policymakers. The whole process of producing NIEs normally takes at least several months.

The NIC has undertaken a number of steps to improve the NIE process under the DNI. These steps are in accordance with the goals and recommendations set out in the SSCI and WMD Commission reports and the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Prevention of Terrorism Act. Most notably, over the last year and a half, the IC has:

- ***Created new procedures to integrate formal reviews of source reporting and technical judgments.*** The DCIA, as the National HUMINT Manager, as well as the Directors of NSA, NGA, and DIA and the Assistant Secretary/INR are now required to submit formal assessments that highlight the strengths, weaknesses, and overall credibility of their sources used in developing the critical judgments of the NIE.
- ***Applied more rigorous standards.*** A textbox is incorporated into all NIEs that explains what we mean by such terms as "we judge" and that clarifies the difference between judgments of likelihood and confidence levels. We have made a concerted effort to not only highlight differences among agencies but to explain the reasons for such differences and to prominently display them in the Key Judgments.

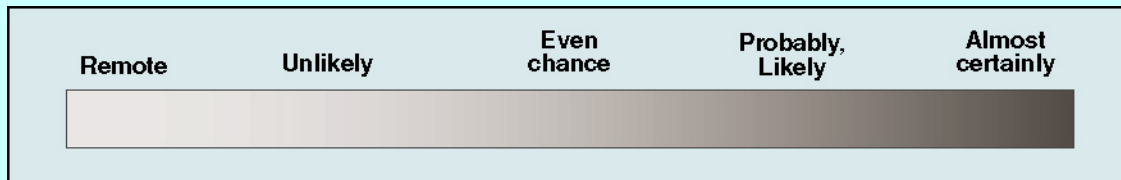
THE IRAQ ESTIMATE: HOW IT WAS PRODUCED

The Iraq Estimate, *Prospects for Iraq's Stability: A Challenging Road Ahead*, followed the standard process for producing National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), including a thorough review of sourcing, in-depth Community coordination, the use of alternative analysis and review by outside experts. Shortly after receiving the Congressional request, the NIC organized a workshop with academic and former government experts to scope out terms of reference (TOR) for the Estimate. IC drafters compiled the initial draft that was reviewed by the NIC and DNI in December. A revised draft was submitted to IC analysts in advance of a three-day coordination meeting in mid-January. National Clandestine Service officers and the other collection agencies reviewed the text for the reliability and proper use of the sourcing. As part of the normal coordination process, analysts had the opportunity to register "dissents" and provide alternative analysis. Reactions by the three outside experts who read the final product were highlighted in the text. The National Intelligence Board, composed of the heads of the 16 IC agencies and chaired by the DNI, reviewed and approved the Estimate on 29 January. As with other NIEs, it is being distributed to senior Administration officials and Members of Congress.

What We Mean When We Say: An Explanation of Estimative Language

When we use words such as “we judge” or “we assess”—terms we use synonymously—as well as “we estimate,” “likely” or “indicate,” we are trying to convey an analytical assessment or judgment. These assessments, which are based on incomplete or at times fragmentary information are not a fact, proof, or knowledge. Some analytical judgments are based directly on collected information; others rest on previous judgments, which serve as building blocks. In either type of judgment, we do not have “evidence” that shows something to be a fact or that definitively links two items or issues.

Intelligence judgments pertaining to likelihood are intended to reflect the Community’s sense of the probability of a development or event. Assigning precise numerical ratings to such judgments would imply more rigor than we intend. The chart below provides a rough idea of the relationship of terms to each other.



We do not intend the term “unlikely” to imply an event will not happen. We use “probably” and “likely” to indicate there is a greater than even chance. We use words such as “we cannot dismiss,” “we cannot rule out,” and “we cannot discount” to reflect an unlikely—or even remote—event whose consequences are such it warrants mentioning. Words such as “may be” and “suggest” are used to reflect situations in which we are unable to assess the likelihood generally because relevant information is nonexistent, sketchy, or fragmented.

In addition to using words within a judgment to convey degrees of likelihood, we also ascribe “high,” “moderate,” or “low” confidence levels based on the scope and quality of information supporting our judgments.

- “High confidence” generally indicates our judgments are based on high-quality information and/or the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment.
- “Moderate confidence” generally means the information is interpreted in various ways, we have alternative views, or the information is credible and plausible but not corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence.
- “Low confidence” generally means the information is scant, questionable, or very fragmented and it is difficult to make solid analytic inferences, or we have significant concerns or problems with the sources.

Key Judgments

Iraqi society's growing polarization, the persistent weakness of the security forces and the state in general, and all sides' ready recourse to violence are collectively driving an increase in communal and insurgent violence and political extremism. Unless efforts to reverse these conditions show measurable progress during the term of this Estimate, the coming 12 to 18 months, we assess that the overall security situation will continue to deteriorate at rates comparable to the latter part of 2006. If strengthened Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), more loyal to the government and supported by Coalition forces, are able to reduce levels of violence and establish more effective security for Iraq's population, Iraqi leaders could have an opportunity to begin the process of political compromise necessary for longer term stability, political progress, and economic recovery.

- Nevertheless, even if violence is diminished, given the current winner-take-all attitude and sectarian animosities infecting the political scene, Iraqi leaders will be hard pressed to achieve sustained political reconciliation in the time frame of this Estimate.

The challenges confronting Iraqis are daunting, and multiple factors are driving the current trajectory of the country's security and political evolution.

- Decades of subordination to Sunni political, social, and economic domination have made the Shia deeply insecure about their hold on power. This insecurity leads the Shia to mistrust US efforts to reconcile Iraqi sects and reinforces their unwillingness to engage with the Sunnis on a variety of issues, including adjusting the structure of Iraq's federal system, reining in Shia militias, and easing de-Bathification.
- Many Sunni Arabs remain unwilling to accept their minority status, believe the central government is illegitimate and incompetent, and are convinced that Shia dominance will increase Iranian influence over Iraq, in ways that erode the state's Arab character and increase Sunni repression.
- The absence of unifying leaders among the Arab Sunni or Shia with the capacity to speak for or exert control over their confessional groups limits prospects for reconciliation. The Kurds remain willing to participate in Iraqi state building but reluctant to surrender any of the gains in autonomy they have achieved.
- The Kurds are moving systematically to increase their control of Kirkuk to guarantee annexation of all or most of the city and province into the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) after the constitutionally mandated referendum scheduled to occur no later than 31 December 2007. Arab groups in Kirkuk continue to resist violently what they see as Kurdish encroachment.

- Despite real improvements, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)—particularly the Iraqi police—will be hard pressed in the next 12-18 months to execute significantly increased security responsibilities, and particularly to operate independently against Shia militias with success. Sectarian divisions erode the dependability of many units, many are hampered by personnel and equipment shortfalls, and a number of Iraqi units have refused to serve outside of the areas where they were recruited.
- Extremists—most notably the Sunni jihadist group al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) and Shia oppositionist Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM)—continue to act as very effective accelerators for what has become a self-sustaining inter-sectarian struggle between Shia and Sunnis.
- Significant population displacement, both within Iraq and the movement of Iraqis into neighboring countries, indicates the hardening of ethno-sectarian divisions, diminishes Iraq’s professional and entrepreneurial classes, and strains the capacities of the countries to which they have relocated. The UN estimates over a million Iraqis are now in Syria and Jordan.

The Intelligence Community judges that the term “civil war” does not adequately capture the complexity of the conflict in Iraq, which includes extensive Shia-on-Shia violence, al-Qa’ida and Sunni insurgent attacks on Coalition forces, and widespread criminally motivated violence. Nonetheless, the term “civil war” accurately describes key elements of the Iraqi conflict, including the hardening of ethno-sectarian identities, a sea change in the character of the violence, ethno-sectarian mobilization, and population displacements.

Coalition capabilities, including force levels, resources, and operations, remain an essential stabilizing element in Iraq. If Coalition forces were withdrawn rapidly during the term of this Estimate, we judge that this almost certainly would lead to a significant increase in the scale and scope of sectarian conflict in Iraq, intensify Sunni resistance to the Iraqi Government, and have adverse consequences for national reconciliation.

- If such a rapid withdrawal were to take place, we judge that the ISF would be unlikely to survive as a non-sectarian national institution; neighboring countries—invited by Iraqi factions or unilaterally—might intervene openly in the conflict; massive civilian casualties and forced population displacement would be probable; AQI would attempt to use parts of the country—particularly al-Anbar province—to plan increased attacks in and outside of Iraq; and spiraling violence and political disarray in Iraq, along with Kurdish moves to control Kirkuk and strengthen autonomy, could prompt Turkey to launch a military incursion.

A number of identifiable developments *could* help to reverse the negative trends driving Iraq’s current trajectory. They include:

- ***Broader Sunni acceptance of the current political structure and federalism*** to begin to reduce one of the major sources of Iraq’s instability.

- *Significant concessions by Shia and Kurds* to create space for Sunni acceptance of federalism.
- *A bottom-up approach*—deputizing, resourcing, and working more directly with neighborhood watch groups and establishing grievance committees—to help mend frayed relationships between tribal and religious groups, which have been mobilized into communal warfare over the past three years.

A key enabler for all of these steps would be stronger Iraqi leadership, which could enhance the positive impact of all the above developments.

Iraq's neighbors influence, and are influenced by, events within Iraq, but the involvement of these outside actors is not likely to be a major driver of violence or the prospects for stability because of the self-sustaining character of Iraq's internal sectarian dynamics. Nonetheless, Iranian lethal support for select groups of Iraqi Shia militants clearly intensifies the conflict in Iraq. Syria continues to provide safehaven for expatriate Iraqi Bathists and to take less than adequate measures to stop the flow of foreign jihadists into Iraq.

- For key Sunni regimes, intense communal warfare, Shia gains in Iraq, and Iran's assertive role have heightened fears of regional instability and unrest and contributed to a growing polarization between Iran and Syria on the one hand and other Middle East governments on the other. But traditional regional rivalries, deepening ethnic and sectarian violence in Iraq over the past year, persistent anti-Americanism in the region, anti-Shia prejudice among Arab states, and fears of being perceived by their publics as abandoning their Sunni co-religionists in Iraq have constrained Arab states' willingness to engage politically and economically with the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad and led them to consider unilateral support to Sunni groups.
- Turkey does not want Iraq to disintegrate and is determined to eliminate the safehaven in northern Iraq of the Kurdistan People's Congress (KGK, formerly PKK)—a Turkish Kurdish terrorist group.

A number of identifiable internal security and political triggering events, including sustained mass sectarian killings, assassination of major religious and political leaders, and a complete Sunni defection from the government have the potential to convulse severely Iraq's security environment. Should these events take place, they could spark an abrupt increase in communal and insurgent violence and shift Iraq's trajectory from gradual decline to rapid deterioration with grave humanitarian, political, and security consequences. Three prospective security paths might then emerge:

- *Chaos Leading to Partition.* With a rapid deterioration in the capacity of Iraq's central government to function, security services and other aspects of sovereignty would collapse. Resulting widespread fighting could produce *de facto* partition,

dividing Iraq into three mutually antagonistic parts. Collapse of this magnitude would generate fierce violence for at least several years, ranging well beyond the time frame of this Estimate, before settling into a partially stable end-state.

- ***Emergence of a Shia Strongman.*** Instead of a disintegrating central government producing partition, a security implosion could lead Iraq's potentially most powerful group, the Shia, to assert its latent strength.
- ***Anarchic Fragmentation of Power.*** The emergence of a checkered pattern of local control would present the greatest potential for instability, mixing extreme ethno-sectarian violence with debilitating intra-group clashes.